

Children’s Moment

Hello, girls and boys. Esperanza and I pray for you and your family. We love you and we appreciate you.

Esperanza, how are our seedlings doing?

If your seeds are like ours, some of them are really growing.

Why are there so many pots, Esperanza? Oh, because the sprouts need room to grow when they get bigger. We have to wait until they’re big enough to grow on their own. That’s when they are transplanted.

They’ll grow bigger, get taller and stay healthy when they get sun, water and care. It’s still too cold for them to be out at night, so we bring them inside. You do have to be careful to keep them moist, but not to overwater them. The best thing to do is to care for them every day.

How are your seeds doing? I hope you’re keeping them moist, warm and giving them a little sun every day. I hope you’re caring for them every day.

Some of the seeds are still kind of slow growing. We know some didn’t sprout. Esperanza planted some new seeds and some new kinds of seeds. What did you plant?

One thing I notice is that each type of plant grows in it’s own way. It has it’s own shape. Each one will grow up to do different things. Some will give us vegetables. Some will give us herbs. Some will give us flowers. All of them are what God made them to be.

You’re just like these seeds. Each of you will grow up to do different things. You’ll be good at different things. You’ll enjoy different kinds of activities. All of you are what God made you to be. And, just your seedlings, each of you is cared for and loved by your parents each day.

Jesus loves you and we do, too.

Will you pray with me?

You are invited to be part of Sunday School online. Visit us at www.coronaumc.com/childrensministry to sign up.

Message: “A New, Spiritual Life”

You may not know it, but we’re surrounded by hidden messages.

Here’s one example. Take a look at this image. It looks normal. We may see it many times during the week. And yet there’s something hidden in plain sight. Look for the arrow in the “Ex” part of the logo.



How about this one? It’s a picture of the Baskin-Robbins logo. You can see how many flavors they advertise right there, in front of you.



How about something more mundane?

If you play cards, you may or may not have noticed the king of hearts has no mustache, while those in other suits do. We live in a word filled with symbols and meanings hidden in plain sight.

What does this have to do with transplanting and our scripture lesson for today? To paraphrase Jesus, “*Everyone who has eyes should pay attention*” (Matthew 13:9). Usually, Jesus said this when he told a parable, a story with a meaning that is hidden in plain sight.

Jesus told parables about the kingdom of God and about life.

Last week, we read the parable of the sower in Matthew 13. Jesus said the words at the end. He’s telling us there’s an important lesson, hidden in plain sight. We talked about it. In plain sight is the message that you need to be ready for your spiritual life to take hold, grow and bear fruit. The hidden message is that we can all become healthy, fruitful soil, bearing spiritual fruit. What is initially hidden can make a joyful appearance.

We’ve been talking about transplanting for several weeks.

We’ve all needed a change after the past year, when everyone’s lives

were turned upside-down. As we look ahead, there are lessons we need to pay attention to. I believe one of those lessons is that we need to spend more time tending to and caring for our spiritual life. The reason is obvious, once revealed: this is the way Jesus shows us, the way to a better, more full life now and for all of eternity. But that leads to a question ...

What is our spiritual life? After all, our soul, the spiritual side of our being is hidden. You can't take it out and take a look at it. We don't have a warning light like you find on the dashboard that says “check engine.” Maybe we should have a “check soul” light. That's a good idea, though I bet it would be lit up for most of us. Maybe it's time to pull into a church or talk to your pastor or go to a small group meeting.

What is our soul? Dallas Willard offers one view: “[Our] ‘soul’ is the hidden or ‘spiritual’ side of a person. It includes our thoughts and feelings, along with our heart or will, with its intents and choices. It also includes our bodily life and social relations, which, in their inner meaning and nature, are just as ‘hidden’ as our thoughts and feelings.” Pastor Willard goes on to say, “The secret to a strong, healthy life lies in how we work *with* God in all [aspects of our soul].”¹

The dimensions of our soul – our will, mind and body, are what make us real people. Our inner being is reflected in our outer being. If our soul is troubled or conflicted or malnourished, then that reflects in our outward life. That's true for good or for bad. Our skills, experience and circumstances are influential, but they play a much smaller role than our soul does.

Jesus knew this well. In his most famous sermon Jesus said, “*every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit*” (Matthew 7:17, NRSV). Jesus used fig trees, grapevines and other fruit bearing plants as metaphors for the inner aspects of our lives and what we think, say and do.

It's important for us to tend to our soul. That means spending time with God. Jesus makes it clear, “*I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, then you will produce much fruit*” (John

¹ [Dallas Willard / Personal Soul Care \(dwillard.org\)](http://dwillard.org)

15:5, CEB). He then said, *“If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I kept [God’s] commandments and remain in [God’s] love. I have said these things to you so that my joy will be in you and your joy will be complete. This is my commandment: love each other just as I have loved you”* (vv9-12).

Let me be clear: we can’t care for our soul or love our neighbor with our whole being. Trying to do so is an impossible burden. It would make us angry and hopeless. That’s because our will, mind and strength are limited. God doesn’t have our limits. When we trust and rely on God in all aspects of our life, God’s power and grace flow through us. When we work *with* God in our inner and outer lives, amazing things can happen.

With Jesus by our side, we can be who we are meant to be – God’s loved children. And, as we live into that kind of life, we do what God calls us to do. Our inner and outer lives are the same. Our being and doing flow from a loving relationship with God and other people. We become the manifestation of God’s faith, hope, love, justice and peace.

That’s what we read in our passage for today from 2 Peter 1:4-9.

Reading from the Message:

“Everything that goes into a life of pleasing God has been miraculously given to us by getting to know, personally and intimately, the One who invited us to God. The best invitation we ever received! We were also given absolutely terrific promises to pass on to you - your tickets to participation in the life of God after you turned your back on a world corrupted by lust.

So don’t lose a minute in building on what you’ve been given, complementing your basic faith with good character, spiritual understanding, alert discipline, passionate patience, reverent wonder, warm friendliness, and generous love, each dimension fitting into and developing the others. With these qualities active and growing in your lives, no grass will grow under your feet, no day will pass without its reward as you mature in your experience of our Master Jesus. Without these qualities you can’t see what’s right before you, oblivious that your old sinful life has been wiped off the books.”

God’s blessings are paid forward when we participate in the life Jesus invites us to live. This passion for God and for living is active and growing. Each moment is an opportunity to be with God and experience grace, which interacts with us, nourishes us and helps us become all we can be. I believe that’s what a better life is.

I want to briefly draw your attention to some of the key phrases from the passage. The Common English Bible offers these building blocks: faith partners with moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, affection for others and love. I love the adjectives offered in The Message: basic faith complements good character, spiritual understanding, alert discipline, passionate patience, reverent wonder, warm friendliness and generous love.

These are the facets of our spiritual life, our soul. And each facet our of soul fits with the others and develops the others. Being alert and being passionately patient go hand-in-hand. We’re filled with reverent wonder as our spiritual understanding matures and grows. Warm friendliness and generous love are almost synonyms.

This is what a new life, a spiritual life, looks like. We don’t start off that way. When we (the soil) are ready, the seed hidden within us sprouts and grows under God’s care. It starts off small, but with the right nourishment – a connection with God, it grows and thrives. Transplanting happens at some point along the way. Our life is renewed and everyone benefits. All of creation is glad.

What does this mean to you? For some of us, it means less trying and more being. We need to stop trying to fill God’s shoes, feeling like we’re responsible for making everything turn out right. We need to pause, rest and nourish our soul by spending time with God. Only then will we be open to where God is already at work. We find joy when we rely on God for strength.

For others, it means being less passive and more active. Jesus calls all of us to be active in our faith, not just hearers but doers. God gives us spiritual gifts to equip us to love and care for others. Sure, it’s going to take you outside your comfort zone, but all good things do. Stop

waiting to be served and serve someone else, no strings attached. When you can do that with a smile, you know you’re on the way.

One final thought on how to embrace spiritual things hidden in plain sight. One of the best ways to do so is to have a spiritual guide. Pastors and teachers often serve in this role. There are people who feel a call and go through training to be spiritual directors. They help us to connect with the spiritual side of our being. They help us with the pitfalls on the spiritual journey we all walk through life, from traps to plateaus, through valleys and on mountain tops.

If you feel like you need some spiritual guidance, I’m available, as are others. If you feel a call to become a spiritual guide, please contact me. I can direct you to some resources and classes to help you grow.

Faith, hope, love, joy and peace. These are the foundations of a full life, a spiritual life, no longer hidden in plain sight. Open your eyes and see.

2 Peter 1:4-9 (MSG)

Everything that goes into a life of pleasing God has been miraculously given to us by getting to know, personally and intimately, the One who invited us to God. The best invitation we ever received! We were also given absolutely terrific promises to pass on to you - your tickets to participation in the life of God after you turned your back on a world corrupted by lust.

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